

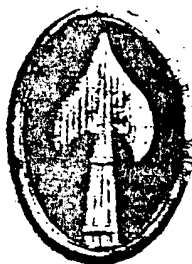
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The Wartime OSS

By Richard Dunlop



At a WWII press conference, a reporter asked President Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Mr. President, is Bill Donovan's work still a secret?"

"Oh my, yes," replied Roosevelt. "Heavens, he operates all over the world."

In June 1941, six months before Pearl Harbor, FDR called Donovan to the White House and asked him to set up America's first central intelligence organization. Donovan had served Presidents since 1919, when President Woodrow Wilson sent him to Siberia to discover what was going on in the Russian civil war.

During the 1920s and '30s, he virtually was a one-man intelligence service. As the tragic events in Europe and the Pacific led to war, he took on missions of increasing importance. Roosevelt called him "my secret legs." Donovan, the most highly decorated hero of WWI, a Founder of The American Legion and a prominent political leader, carried on the secret life of a master spy. He drafted plans for what became the Office of Strategic Services.

"Bill Donovan conceived the OSS as a worldwide intelligence organization that could collect the facts necessary to develop our policy and war strategy," said Allen Dulles, a key Donovan lieutenant, who after the war became the first director of the CIA. "He was convinced that Axis secrets were to be found not only in Berlin, Rome and Tokyo, but also in other capitals and outposts around the world."

Moles, whom Donovan had carefully nurtured in the 1920s and '30s, were highly placed in the German and Italian governments. Other agents infiltrated the German High Command and the *Abwehr*, the German secret service. As

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"Wild Bill" Donovan, a WWI hero and Legion Founder, put together the first US intelligence unit, the forerunner of today's modern CIA.

a result, the OSS learned in advance about the development of German jet aircraft, the Nazi effort to develop a nuclear weapon, secrets of the V-1s and V-2s and the plot against Hitler.

While the OSS sought strategic intelligence all over the world, it also parachuted agents behind enemy lines to glean tactical information in combat areas. Donovan organized guerrillas in Europe and Asia to wreck enemy lines of communication and supply and to tie down troops that otherwise might have been used at the front.

A technical group at OSS headquar-



ters in Washington went to work creating new gadgets and techniques for sabotaging the enemy war effort. This equipment ranged from sophisticated communications to the first plastic explosive, which was called "Aunt Jemima," because it could be safely baked into pancakes if necessary.

The OSS Morale Operations Branch carried out undercover psychological warfare to confuse the enemy and break his power to resist. Donovan set researchers to work in business, university and governmental archives digging out information and photographs that would help illuminate the theaters of war. He assembled what was called "Donovan's Brain Trust," the best academic and analytical experts in America, in the Research and Analysis branch. Their task was to explore political and economic aspects of the war around the world.

Sir William Stephenson, known as "Intrepid" in intelligence circles, commented that the OSS R&A Branch was "the most brilliant team of analysts in the history of intelligence."

Donovan built a wartime intelligence organization of 25,000. The OSS made a vast contribution to the winning of WWII, but it was dissolved in 1945 by President Harry S. Truman, who did not realize the key role that a central intelligence agency would play in safeguarding peace in the turbulent postwar period. Nonetheless, Donovan's wartime OSS was the forerunner of the CIA, and Donovan helped to draft the legislation that created today's Central Intelligence Agency. Several CIA directors, including William Casey, were in the OSS.

Just within the main entrance of CIA headquarters hangs a painting of William J. "Wild Bill" Donovan as a tribute to the man who, throughout the intelligence community, is acknowledged to be, "the father of American intelligence." □

Founder of the OSS was W. J. "Wild Bill" Donovan, seen here in a portrait that hangs in CIA headquarters.